

Conservationists blast water district

Written by David DeMille

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thespectrum.com



Jeremy Aguero, principal analyst with Applied Analytics, gives a presentation of his findings on Washington County's water economics during a Chamber of Commerce luncheon in early July. / Trevor Christensen / The Spectrum & Daily News

Powell Pipeline alternatives meeting

At an Aug. 15 meeting of the Washington County Water Conservancy District's board of directors, the Community Integrated Planning Advisory Committee, Amelia Nuding, water-energy analyst with Western Resource Advocates, will present her proposal for a conservation-based alternative to the Lake Powell Pipeline. The meeting is scheduled for 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the district offices, 533 E. Water Works Drive in St. George. Agendas, a list of committee members and other information on the CIRPAC are posted at

www.wcwc.org/information/cirpac/agendas. For information on Nuding's Local Waters Alternative to the Lake Powell Pipeline report, visit www.westernresourceadvocates.org/water/powell.php.

ST. GEORGE — State and local water managers, under scrutiny from groups opposed to the Lake Powell Pipeline, have upped their efforts to engage the public about the project and combat what they say is misinformation being spread by groups opposed to growth.

But the increased time and money being spent has environmental groups balking at what they are calling a publicly funded marketing effort meant to promote the controversial project.

As they've poured over contracts and associated documents, environmental advocates fighting to stop the pipeline from being built say they have identified more than \$200,000 being spent on what they argue is propaganda about the pipeline.

The Washington County Water Conservancy District has upped its budget for public education from \$110,000 last year to \$216,000 this year, also bringing in outside firms to help facilitate regular meetings with area officials and give public presentations on the economic importance of water.

Add in funds paid to have films made about the area's water situation and employee salaries and "we have several hundreds of thousands of dollars going into these public relations campaigns geared around the Lake Powell Pipeline project," said Christi Wedig, executive director of the Glen Canyon Institute and past administrator for the Washington County-based Citizens for Dixie's Future.

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Corey Cram, associate general manager for the district, said Wedig and others are mischaracterizing the district's expenditures. Cram said if the district wasn't under attack from "agenda-driven individuals or groups" spreading misinformation, there wouldn't be as much of a need for the district to counter those charges.

"We're not ashamed that we're planning," Cram said. "We're looking to take care of our people and plan for our water future."

The latest expenditure, a \$10,000-per-month retainer for a consulting firm from Las Vegas to help present the economics behind water to the public, has pipeline opponents especially riled.

Deseret News

Oil spill cleanup continues in Hyde Park

By Pat Reavy, Deseret News

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Cleanup of an oil spill continued Sunday along a canal in the North Logan/Hyde Park area. (KSL.com)

LOGAN — Cleanup of an oil spill continued Sunday along a canal in the North Logan/Hyde Park area.

Saturday night, Cache County officials discovered that the top coat of oil applied to a road construction project had washed away during a rainstorm that night and into a nearby canal. The oil carried over a five mile section of the canal.

Bear River Health Department spokeswoman Jill Parker said Sunday morning that the amount of oil that spilled into the canal was still being calculated.

The spill was contained and diverted late Saturday night into a field near Highway 91. Parker said drinking water in the area was never immediately in risk. Several departments were assisting with the cleanup Sunday.

Residents who notice their irrigation water is brown or has an unusual order were told not to water their properties.

A press conference was scheduled for 3:30 p.m. Sunday to update residents on the situation.

Information will be updated as it becomes available.

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So long lagoons? New Logan wastewater plant seems inevitable despite hefty price tag

By Kelly Cannon | Posted: Saturday, June 29, 2013 8:25 pm

Over the past 50 years, the Logan Lagoon Wastewater Treatment Facility has cleaned and filtered the wastewater that the majority of Cache County flushes down the toilet.

While not necessarily a pleasant task, the lagoon system is one of the largest of its kind in North America, receiving more than 15 million gallons of wastewater per day. The passive system filters out solids and harmful chemicals. While not fit for human contact, the water discharge is clean enough to use for irrigation after it has spent a minimum of 90 days in the facility.

However, the Environmental Protection Agency has put forth new regulations regarding the levels of phosphorus, nitrogen and ammonia that can be in water leaving wastewater treatment facilities in Utah. These new requirements must be met by 2017. The lagoon system is not equipped to remove these chemicals. This leaves Logan, the owner of the facility, and Nibley, Providence, River Heights, North Logan, Hyde Park and Smithfield cities, which also use the facility, in a predicament as to how they handle its waste.

How the lagoons work

Located west of Logan near the public shooting range, the cleaning system of the lagoon is divided into seven cells, allowing water to passively flow while it is being cleaned.

"The lagoons are a very simple, passive system. Some people call it natural systems. The waste water comes in from the east end, which we call the head works. We remove some of the solids there," said Issa Hamud, the director of the Logan City Environmental Department. "Then everything comes into the primary cells divided into two areas, A1 and A2, and then just follows through very passively from one cell to another."

The water is then chlorinated before leaving in a slow stream to be used for irrigation during the growing season and flows to the Cutler Reservoir during the winter.

The lagoon works through a process of aeration.

"We aerate to reduce the amount of BOD, biochemical oxygen demand, and suspended solids that are in the wastewater that need to be removed before it is discharged," Hamud said. "That's what this is. It's a very simple system. Wastewater comes in, and it stays in the lagoon for a minimum of 90 days to 180 days. Eventually, it comes out clean and we discharge it."

While the lagoon has worked well for the past 50 years, it is not able to remove phosphorus, nitrogen and ammonia, chemicals that have received stricter regulations from the EPA.

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"Phosphorus needs to be around 1 (parts per million), and what we discharge right now is about 6, between 4 and 6," Hamud said.

According to Hamud, water containing phosphorus is good for irrigation because it is a nutrient that helps plant growth. However, it also allows for algae growth. When algae grows, the oxygen level in the water is depleted. This can have an adverse affect on the aquatic life in Cutler Reservoir.

Nitrogen is also a nutrient that is good for irrigation but can harm aquatic life because it depletes oxygen.

"What we discharge right now is about 14 (ppm), and it's in the form of ammonia," Hamud said. "The new ammonia limit is less than 3 and in some cases 1.3. The lagoons cannot do that."

Going mechanical

Hamud and representatives from the Utah Division of Water Quality met with the Logan Municipal Council last Tuesday to discuss the possibility of building a mechanical treatment plant that would replace the lagoon system. The council gave its approval to city employees to begin looking for ways to fund the new facility, a mechanical treatment plant, that can cost between \$110 million and \$125 million.

If built, the mechanical treatment plant would completely replace the lagoon system.

"The lagoons will go out of business," Hamud said. "They will no longer be used once that is complete and done."

There is a possibility of keeping the lagoons open so Utah State University can continue to use it as a research facility, looking into the ways algae can be used in the filter system and then used as a biofuel.

One of the benefits of having a mechanical plant is such a facility will have a much smaller footprint on the area.

"We acquired 100 acres to the south of here, and we're going to build the plant there and probably use 30 to 40 acres maybe," said Jim Harps, the director of Wastewater Management and the manager of the lagoons. "It allows you to treat a lot more water with a smaller footprint."

According to Harps, the mechanical plant would also be able to clean more water at a faster rate.

Harps oversees the testing of the water not only for phosphorus, nitrogen and ammonia but also for organic matter, solids and metals. Working out of a tiny lab on site, he and his employee send in reports and samples to the state on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis. If a mechanical plant is built, the lab will be much larger and more accommodating for testing.

"We'll have a much bigger lab. There will be some daily stuff we'll want to keep track of. With the

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mechanical plant, there's stuff you want to keep track of because you have solids that you're returning, solids you're returning. So we want to keep track of the amount of solids we're collecting and the bacteria that we have in there," Harps said. "We might have a microbiologist perhaps, or some of us will be trained in microbiology. We'll take lots of samples daily. It'll change, it'll definitely change. We'll have to hire a few new people."

Coming up with cash

The main disadvantage between a mechanical plant and a lagoon system is cost — not only to build the facility but also to operate it. According to Hamud, a mechanical plant requires a lot of energy, a lot of chemicals and a lot more people to run. The lagoon, being a passive system, requires only two employees and minimal amount of energy consumption.

Acquiring the money to build the mechanical treatment plant is the biggest challenge facing Logan city.

"It's a huge infrastructure designed and managed of the construction itself," Hamud said. "There's a lot of things involved. It's a huge project, probably the biggest that Logan city has ever undertaken. The state is also telling us it's probably the biggest that they have ever funded."

The city itself has saved \$15 million in anticipation of the project.

"There are two other sources, one being the Rural Development Fund that we might be able to get \$20 million and there's also the (Capital Improvement Plan) fund that we might be able to get \$5 million," Hamud said.

The city is also looking into borrowing money from a revolving fund provided by the Department of Water Quality. Established in the late 1980s, the fund provides loans to communities who need help financing water quality projects.

"The loans would go out and the repayments would come back in and replenish the fund. Hence, the revolving fund," said Walt Baker, the director of the Utah Division of Water Quality. "Since 1988, the EPA has been providing grants to states to go into this revolving fund."

Communities qualify for the loans by having a project that is needed and that is a priority.

"Logan qualifies for the funding and we've spoken to them this past week as we met with the City Council and the mayor," Baker said. "They are intending to submit an application for funding to assist in this major project."

No repayment schedule has yet been determined should Logan secure the loan.

Even with the assistance from the state, Logan will need to go out for a bond to help fund the project.

"We'll have to go out to the public for around \$30 million," said Logan Mayor Randy Watts.

According to Watts, the bond would be paid for through an increase in the sewage fee to residents who use it. The increase could be between \$10 and \$13 a month.

Neighborhood help

There is also potential for the other cities that would use the facility to contribute money in its construction. A few of the elected representatives of the cities are discussing the idea of creating a board that would oversee the mechanical plant instead of it being handled by Logan alone.

"In the past, the lagoons have been Logan's, and Logan is completely responsible for treating the sewage. If we end up changing our method of treatment, going to a mechanical plant or something like that, all of the cities are going to have to take ownership in the plant rather than just having it be a Logan system, and everyone just pays to Logan," said Smithfield City Manager Jim Gass. "I think there's going to have to be some representation and some involvement and some responsibility on the part of the other cities to shoulder the burden that comes with meeting this new standard more than financial."

Skarlet Bankhead, the city administrator in Providence, said her city is also open to the idea of creating a board to oversee the mechanical treatment plant.

"I think Providence city as a whole is certainly interested in exploring a board or a special sewer district or whatever they would call it. But I don't know at this point. I personally don't have enough information to feel one way or the other," Bankhead said. "It's certainly something that needs to be explored, but it may end up being the way we're going is the best way."

Watts said there has been discussion on creating a board, but it hasn't gone past discussion.

"They'd set up a sewer district. There's been some discussion, but it hasn't got into anything more than discussion," Watts said. "As we move further into it, if the other cities want to move that direction, they'll bring that back to the wastewater board, and we'll sit down and discuss it if that's what they elect to do."

During the meeting between the Logan Municipal Council and the parties involved with the building of the mechanical plant, Watts noticed no other city representatives were present.

"I did not have anybody from any of the other cities represented. I had no mayors, no council. I had no city managers," Watts said. "And that was a little disconcerting for me."

Watts, who is seeking re-election in November, hopes he will be able to finish this project.

"The reason I'm running again is I want to finish this and close a lid on it. I'm so entrenched in it. It's consumed me because it's such a big dollar amount, and it affects all of us. I'm trying everything I can," Watts said. "I need the state's help. I've visited with the lieutenant governor. I've rattled everybody and they know exactly what our concerns are, and I'm going to continue to do that and

Coalville to begin mid-August

Aaron Osowski, The Park Record The Park Record

Posted:

ParkRecord.com

Coalville's long-awaited wastewater treatment plant is set to finally begin construction this summer, and according to Mayor Duane Schmidt, it comes at just the right time.

Since 2006, the City of Coalville has been looking to "address concerns about land ownership, increasing maintenance costs and future capacity" associated with the existing facility, according to information provided on the city's website.

The treatment plant, which is located on land leased on a 50-year agreement from the United States Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), was set to have its lease expire in October of 2014. The new facility will be located just west of the Rail Trail at the dead end of 100 North in Coalville. Schmidt says this brand new, state-of-the-art facility has been one of his top priorities.

"We thought it was prudent for us to build a new facility," Schmidt said. "The elevation of this facility is higher, and it's not very far from the current one."

Over the last several years, the city has had problems finding funding for the plant. In August of 2010, the city signed an agreement for a grant under the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) 595 program to fund \$5 million of the estimated \$9.5 million project, according to Schmidt.

Since the United States Congress was unable to act on federal budget appropriations in December of 2010, however, the ACOE grant was withdrawn. Schmidt says the city had to start looking for funding all over again after this.

"We were back to the drawing board," Schmidt said.

Stepping up to the plate in April of 2011 to provide funding was the Utah Division of Water Quality (DWQ). Coalville had then approached DWQ, who will be funding the \$9.5 million treatment plant with a \$3.2 million loan and a \$6.3 million grant. The condition for this, however, is that sewer rates must be increased. Schmidt says the time for that is past due.

"The previous administration did not want to touch the fees for water and sewer. They thought it was political suicide," Schmidt said. "We need to keep up with the times; 1995 was the last fee increase."

As part of the funding package, DWQ mandated that sewer rates be put at \$45.94 to pay off the loan. Prior to the resolution in 2010, user rates were \$26 per month. Currently rates are at \$40 per month and must be raised accordingly.

Schmidt is confident that such fee increases will prove beneficial for Coalville residents.

"This new facility will be much better for the community at large. It will secure our future," Schmidt said.

Groundbreaking for the treatment plant is planned for mid-August and construction is expected to take 18 months. Schmidt said an AT&T fiber-optic cable is located near the project site and will need to be moved in "the next week or two."

The look of the new plant will also be vastly different from the previous one.

"People generally don't like the look of treatment plants," Schmidt said. "These buildings will actually be designed to look like agricultural barns."

For more information on Coalville's Wastewater Treatment Facility Project, visit www.coalvillecity.org.

The Salt Lake Tribune

Proposed drinking water, sewer fees face criticism

Environment • Federal budget cuts have states looking for new ways to make up the shortfall.

BY JUDY FAHYS

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

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New statewide water and sewer fees are in the works, and they have already caused a splash the size of a cannonball dive.

The proposed fees — amounting to about 10 cents per month for water district customers and a \$1 a month “toilet tax” — have come under fire from all corners of the state, with urban districts voicing some of the loudest concerns. The fees would help pay for drinking water and water-quality programs in the Department of Environmental Quality.

“They’re basically selling tax increases in the form of fees,” said Fred Finlinson, who represents the Utah Water Coalition, a group comprising the state’s four largest water conservancy districts that has criticized the fees.

Though the drinking-water proposal is advanced and the sewer proposal is just in the early stages, both proposals signal a shifting approach to funding environmental programs in Utah.

While it’s nothing new to have businesses with state-issued environmental licenses cover the costs of their own regulation with fees, programs that benefit the public traditionally have been covered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state general funds.

“That’s the discussion they’re ducking,” Finlinson said.

A big driver behind the fees is that Congress has begun to starve the EPA’s budget. And, coupled with the sequestration cuts, states count on less and less federal funding.

The cuts have prompted the Natural Resources Defense Council to call the current GOP majority in the U.S. House “the most anti-environment House in history.” Its preliminary 2014 budget cuts EPA’s funding by 34 percent, roughly the same as 1976 levels when adjusted for inflation, the environmental group pointed out.

Ken Bousfield, director of the Utah Drinking Water Division, says those EPA reductions are his main reason for seeking the new fee from about 1,000 public water districts. Without the fee, his agency’s budget would be about \$1 million short, and that could mean cutting his 40-person staff by five to 10 — along with the programs they run.

“I’ll try to retain programs the best I can,” he said. “But when you start unzipping the pillow, all the feathers start coming out.”

Bousfield has spent the summer trying to sell the idea around the state at public meetings. At first, he ran into a wall of opposition. And some of that lingers even as the proposal goes out for formal public comment.

The state’s largest drinking-water provider, the Metropolitan Water District of Salt Lake & Sandy, detailed its objections in a July letter. So did Syracuse, Sandy and even the couple behind the South-Forty RV Park in Marysville, Piute County.

“I am informing you it is something we will not pay for,” said Jim and Terri Peterson. “We already pay fees and our time to have our water continually tested for the state.”

Doug Allen, mayor of the San Juan County city of Monticello, initially resisted the fee. But he’s more concerned about the possibility that the state might lose to the EPA its authority to carry out drinking-water laws if it can’t find some way to cover the shortfall.

“We’re not flush with money or anything,” he said, “but I’d much rather have the [state] government be over it [the drinking water provided to the 700 homes and businesses in the community] than the EPA.”

Jodi Hoffman, of the Utah League of Cities and Towns, agrees that the state should preserve its primacy over EPA programs, but her organization disputes the idea that the proposed fees on water and sewer districts are the way to accomplish that.

Fees like these are unprecedented, she said. “The question is, if that’s allowed, then when does it stop?”

The league’s legislative-policy committee recently voted unanimously against the kind of fees proposed by Bousfield’s agency and the “toilet tax” the Division of Water Quality is considering.

Walt Baker, who oversees the state’s water quality office, noted that the \$10 million raised through the sewer-district fee would help

pay to clean up nutrients — primarily phosphorus and nitrogen — from runoff and sewer-plant discharges.

Though not required under pending federal laws or regulations — yet — the effort is the biggest water-quality endeavor since the enactment of the Clean Water Act itself, he said.

“Water quality is a quality-of-life issue,” he said, noting the impact on recreation, drinking water and the environment. “It’s preserving what makes Utah where we want to be.”

And, ultimately, the thinking goes, the statewide program would go a long way toward averting a future EPA crackdown on nutrient-related pollution that could cost billions of dollars. And the idea of generating the funds from user fees is something that resonates with Utahns, Baker said.

“Choose your poison,” he said, noting that either taxes or fees would be coming from Utahns statewide. “It’s either your left pocket or your right pocket.”

He said his office is not pursuing the fee this year. “It’s just not ripe yet.”

Finlinson says it’s time for an adult conversation about the fee vs. tax question. He has no quarrel with the proposals on the table, he just wants any decision about them to be thorough and well-informed.

When you add up all the fees — including costs sewer districts would be passing on to ratepayers to remove the nutrients, a cost he projects to be upward of \$3.75 per household monthly — he estimates that ratepayers would be ponying up \$60 a year or more.

“The issue that is challenging,” said Finlinson, a former state senator, “is when [Baker, for instance] raises the fee for the sewer patrons to pay for the farmers to be better farmers.”

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